CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of tracking an item, the method comprising:

providing the item with an identifier for specifying an item-identification of the item and a tracking-station-identification of a tracking station related to the item;

obtaining from the identifier of the item, via a gate having a gate-identification, the item-identification of the item and the tracking-station-identification; and

communicating to the tracking station identified by the tracking-station-identification the item-identification of the item and the gate-identification of the gate.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein obtaining comprises transmitting the item-identification and the tracking-station-identification from the identifier of the item to the gate.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the identifier of the item comprises a passive source for providing the item-identification and the tracking-station-identification, and wherein obtaining comprises detecting the item-identification and the tracking-station-identification from the passive source.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the item-identification of the item is uniquely associated with the item.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the item-identification of the item comprises an Internet Protocol address for the item.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the gate-identification of the gate is uniquely associated with the gate.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the gate-identification of the gate comprises an Internet Protocol address for the gate.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the gate is coupled with the tracking station via a computing network.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the tracking-station-identification of the tracking-station comprises an Internet Protocol address for the tracking station.

10. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

providing a plurality of geographically distributed gates; and

whenever the item approaches any one of the gates, obtaining, via that gate, the item-identification of the item and the tracking-station-identification from the identifier of the item.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein the item is related to a particular one of a plurality of tracking stations, and wherein the item-identification obtained from the item is communicated, via the approached gate, to the particular tracking station related to the item.

12. The method of claim 1, further comprising communicating to the tracking station an indication of the time of detection of the item-identification.

13. The method of claim 1, wherein the gate-identification of the gate comprises a numerical value, and wherein the tracking station can determine the geographical location of the gate based on the numerical value.

14. The method of claim 1, further comprising conveying position information for the item to a user interested in tracking the item.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the position information is based on the gate-identification.

16. The method of claim 14, wherein the gate includes a positioning system and wherein the position information is obtained from the positioning system of the gate.

17. The method of claim 14, further comprising conveying to the user an indication of a time when the item approaches the location of the gate.

18. The method of claim 1, wherein each of a plurality of items has a corresponding item-identification and is provided with a respective identifier for specifying the corresponding item-identification of that item, and further comprising obtaining, via a gate, the item-identification of each item approaching the gate and communicating to a tracking station related to such item the obtained item-identification and a gate-identification of the gate.

19. A system for tracking an item, the system comprising:

a tracking station associated with the item;

an identifier for specifying an item-identification of the item and a tracking-station-identification of the tracking station; and

a gate coupled with the tracking station for obtaining the item-identification of the item and the tracking-station-identification of the tracking station and communicating the obtained item-identification and a gate-identification of the gate to the tracking station identified by the tracking-station-identification.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein the identifier includes a transmitter for transmitting the item-identification of the item and the tracking-station-identification to the gate.

21. The system of claim 19, wherein the identifier of the item includes a passive source for providing the item-identification of the item and the tracking-station-identification of the tracking station, and wherein the gate includes a detector for detecting the item-identification and the tracking-station-identification from the passive source.

22. The system of claim 19, wherein the item-identification of the item is uniquely associated with the item.

23. The system of claim 19, wherein the item-identification of the item comprises an Internet Protocol address for the item.

24. The system of claim 19, wherein the gate-identification of the gate is uniquely associated with the gate.

25. The system of claim 19, wherein the gate-identification of the gate comprises an Internet Protocol address for the gate.

26. The system of claim 19 wherein the gate is coupled with the tracking station via a computing network.

27. The system of claim 19, further comprising at least one additional gate and at least one additional tracking station, wherein each item is associated with a particular one of the tracking stations, and wherein each gate obtains from the identifier of any item approaching that gate the item-identification of that item and communicates said item-identification to the particular one of the tracking stations together with a gate-identification of the gate.

28. The system of claim 19, wherein the item is related to a particular one of a plurality of tracking stations, and wherein the gate communicates the item-identification obtained from the identifier of the item to the particular tracking station related to the item.

29. The system of claim 19, wherein the gate further communicates to the tracking station an indication of the time of detection of the item-identification.

30. The system of claim 19, wherein the gate-identification of the gate comprises an alphanumerical value from which the tracking station can determine the geographical location of the gate.

31. The system of claim 19, wherein the tracking station conveys position information for the item to a user interested in tracking the item.

32. The system of claim 31, wherein the tracking station conveys an indication of a time at which the item-identification is obtained by the gate.

33. The system of claim 31, wherein the position information is based on the gate-identification.

34. The system of claim 33, wherein the tracking station further conveys to the user an indication of a time when the item approaches the location of the gate.

35. The system of claim 19, wherein each of a plurality of items has a corresponding item-identification and is provided with a respective identifier for specifying the corresponding item-identification of that item, and wherein the gate obtains the item-identification of each item approaching the gate and communicates to a tracking station related to such item the obtained item-identification and a gate-identification of the gate.

36. A system for tracking a plurality of items, each having a unique item-identification and being associated with one of a plurality of tracking stations, the system comprising:

an identifier for each item for specifying an item-identification of that item and a tracking-station-identification of the tracking station associated with the item; and

a plurality of gates for obtaining the item-identification and tracking-station-identification from each approaching item and communicating the obtained item-identification and a gate-identification of the gate to the tracking station identified by the tracking-station-identification.

37. A method of tracking a plurality of items, each having a unique item-identification and being associated with one of a plurality of tracking stations, the method comprising:

providing for each item an identifier for specifying the item-identification of that item and a tracking-station-identification of the tracking station associated with that item;

providing a plurality of geographically distributed gates, each having a unique gate-identification;

obtaining, at each gate approached by one of the items, the item-identification of that item and the tracking-station-identification from the identifier of that item; and

communicating each obtained item-identification and the gate-identification of the gate approached by that item to the tracking station identified by the tracking-station-identification.